

## The Power of Pro Bono: Profile of VLS Volunteer Susan Haney



Longtime VLS volunteer **Susan Haney** has strong beliefs about volunteering her services as an attorney. "As lawyers, we have an ethical job to make the courts more accessible to low-income people. This (law degree) is a gift and I am required to share it." She laments that she turns VLS down as often as she accepts our requests to take cases, but Haney has shown her commitment through time, having taken cases pro bono over the last 15 years.

When asked what she looks for before agreeing to take a consumer case, Haney notes that she looks for instances where the clients need their money back for survival. Given that the vast majority of VLS clients earn under 125% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$28,000 for a family of four), most cases fit this description.

Haney's most recent case involved a fraudulent sale through Craigslist, the online classifieds website. The client purchased a car that turned out to have many more miles than it was represented as having, a fact concealed by a broken odometer. When the car stopped running not long after the purchase, the buyer resorted to bicycling to his job as a substitute teacher in a local middle school.

Haney was successful in winning back the costs of the car for her client. She also sought lawyer's fees of \$500, which she donated to Volunteer Legal Services. "I could have sought more but I wanted the amount to be payable (by the defendant)." She encourages other pro bono attorneys to consider seeking and donating attorneys' fees for pro bono cases, an approach taught to her by consumer protection law expert, **Manny Newburger**, more than twenty years ago.

Haney also encourages other attorneys to consider the professional benefits of pro bono service: "When I was a lowly associate, **Nick von Kreisler** advised me to take any kind of case I could in order to gain experience and training. I think this is especially good advice for new lawyers or anyone wanting to broaden their practice horizons."

VLS Executive Director, **Trish McAllister**, expresses her appreciation of Haney's creative and multi-faceted support of the organization. "We have many volunteers who give the gift of time and many donors who give financial gifts; supporters like Susan, who give both time and money, are special."